

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

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- A vehicle port control system comprising:
a capacitive sensor sensing an object a predetermined distance about said vehicle port;
a lock securing said port; and
a control unit in communication with said capacitive sensor, controlling the actuation of said lock.
2. The vehicle port control system of Claim 1 including an electronic key device sending a key code to said control unit wherein said control unit actuates said lock when said key code matches said security code.
3. The vehicle port control system of Claim 2 wherein said electronic key device sends said key code when requested by said control unit.
4. The vehicle port control system of Claim 3 wherein said control unit requests said key code when said object crosses said predetermined distance.
5. The vehicle port control system of Claim 1 wherein said object is at least a portion of a person.
6. The vehicle port control system of Claim 1 including a vehicle subsystem in communication with said control unit, responding to the presence of an object crossing said predetermined distance.
7. The vehicle port control system of Claim 1 including a latch controlling opening and closing of said port.

8. The vehicle port control system of Claim 7 wherein said latch includes a sensor in communication with said control unit that detects movement of said latch.
9. The vehicle port control system of Claim 8 wherein said sensor is an infrared sensor.

10. A vehicle port control system comprising:
a vehicle port;
a capacitive sensor sensing an object a predetermined distance about said port;
a control unit in communication with said capacitive sensor, comparing a signal from said capacitive sensor with a predetermined threshold.
11. The vehicle port control system of Claim 10 including a lock controlled by said control unit, securing said port.
12. The vehicle port control system of Claim 11 including an electronic key device sending a key code to said control unit wherein said control unit actuates said lock when said key code matches said security code.
13. The vehicle port control system of Claim 12 wherein said electronic key device sends said key code when requested by said control unit.
14. The vehicle port control system of Claim 13 wherein said control unit requests said key code when said object crosses said predetermined distance.
15. The vehicle port control system of Claim 10 wherein said object is at least a portion of a person.
16. The vehicle port control system of Claim 15 wherein said predetermined threshold relates to the presence of said at least portion of a person within said predetermined distance.
17. The vehicle port control system of Claim 10 including a vehicle subsystem in communication with said control unit, responding to the presence of an object crossing said predetermined distance.

18. The vehicle port control system of Claim 10 including a latch controlling opening and closing of said port.
19. The vehicle port control system of Claim 7 wherein said latch includes a sensor in communication with said control unit that detects movement of said latch.

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20. A method of port control comprising the steps of:
- establishing a voltage on a first surface;
 - establishing about the same voltage on a second surface spaced from the first surface;
 - establishing a lower voltage on a third surface spaced from the second surface, thereby propagating an electric field from the first surface, around the second surface, and to the third surface;
 - sensing changes in the electric field caused by the presence of an object in the electric field;
 - generating an electric signal based on the changes in the electric field;
 - comparing the electric signal to a predetermined threshold; and
 - controlling a port based on the comparison.

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